

Love Remembers

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I don't know if the stories about Jesus being alive again happened exactly that way. I believe it's true that his friends felt his impact when they were together after his death. I believe it's true that he lived on in their lives when they did the things he taught them to do, like show kindness to strangers, and teach people about God, and bless and share bread, and speak up for what is right even when it's dangerous. I believe it's true that following Jesus gave his friends hope that there would be a world to come, a world when everything that is broken will be made whole and every hurt will be healed.

The stories about Jesus take place about two thousand years ago. Even to this day, there are people who never met him in his life on earth who hold Jesus in their minds and hearts when they show kindness, when they do justice, and when they volunteer for some greater purpose. Even to this day, Christians all over the world call his story to mind when they sit down together and bless their bread and drink in memory of Jesus.

When people gather to live out their values, study, and share, they may be remembering other loved ones as well, people they did know in earthly life. For Christians, they can hold their personal loved ones and their ideas about Jesus at the same time. For those who don't consider themselves Christians, remembering human beings is meaningful enough. All of us can learn from the stories about the friends of Jesus how we might hold on to the memory and teachings of people we know who have died.

The women at the tomb were ready to face the reality of death. The same women had been with Jesus when he died, and they were at the tomb to prepare his body for a proper burial. One of the ways Love remembers is with courage. Having the courage to stick by our loved ones in pain, and having the courage to say goodbye are aspects of love. Grief hurts. That grief tells us how much of a difference our departed loved ones have made to us, and reminds us of our ability to know love. The women at the tomb show us that having the courage to experience our feelings and to be present with others who are experiencing pain are some of the ways that Love remembers.

The friends on the road to Emmaus did not know their fellow traveler right away. Walking together and intellectual debate engaged their minds and bodies, but they truly remembered Love when they offered hospitality to a stranger and when they honored him by asking that he bless the bread they shared. We may remember the

compassionate example of loved ones who have died when we help feed the hungry. We may remember loved ones when we cook large amounts of food from an old family recipe and share the food with others. When someone who taught us about kindness is gone, Love remembers as we show kindness to others.

The disciples in the boat remembered Love when they allowed themselves to believe in abundance. The person on the shore suggested that they cast their nets out on the right side of the boat, maybe trying something different than what they had tried before, maybe trying something they had already tried many times. By working together in the spirit of their mission, the friends created a space for memory and hope. This is what religious communities can do. Cooperate, believe that by considering what the world needs you can accomplish astonishing things, dare to hope. Love remembers when we keep working on the mission we have accepted together, even when the world changes and the way we have to work on our mission changes with it.

In the stories we told today, the people did not find a resolution to their challenges in the way they expected to find it. They experienced confusion and despair. The women at the tomb did not have a chance to face their loss in the way they had prepared to do that. Even after meeting the angels, they were frightened, and did not know what would happen next. Remember the friends on the road to Emmaus, “we had hoped.” In each case, they found hope and insight when they returned to their spiritual path, when they did difficult things that were rooted in their deepest values: show courage, face their feelings, welcome the stranger, share their food, try something new.

Perhaps some of the members of this congregation can identify with those feelings of shock, disappointment, and disorientation as you learn that the ministerial search is not yet complete. I want to be clear about the wording. Your ministerial search has not yet turned out the way you expected, but that is not a failure. It means the resolution will happen in a different time and in a different way than what you thought. Your ministerial search committee did a beautiful job of translating this congregation’s hopes into a coherent search. There is not a match yet. It takes strength to wait for the right minister instead of grasping for the wrong minister. Your ministerial search committee continues to work very hard and deserves your gratitude and support.

In the stories, the friends who had experienced loss and disappointment found their way back to their deepest values. When they connected with each other and with the teachings of their faith, they found that hope was among them. May it be so with you. You do not need assurance about your next minister to be kind to one another, to welcome newcomers, to register voters, to feed the hungry, to practice curiosity and gratitude. You do not need final answers before you accept one another and encourage

one another to spiritual growth. In a moment, we'll sing a hymn that is very important to those among us who are UU Christian. I'm going to ask that those who are not take this opportunity to engage in poetic metaphor, or at least to support the person next to you who needs you to encourage them on their path. You do not need to wait before you practice the seven principles. You know how to do these things. To figure out what to do next, consult Love. Love remembers what to do.

The Board and Ministerial Search Committee will make a plan for the next action steps. Hang in there, and you will enter the next chapter together. I don't know what the future holds. I believe in this congregation and in your growing commitment to your covenant. I believe in the leaders of this congregation. I don't know how the story will proceed in exactly what way, but I believe your values are true.

Resurrection is a mystery. We may believe, we may wonder. We know that love remembers. What is remembered lives.

So be it. Blessed be. Amen.